

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED ON MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus has approved final recommendations for the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as prepared by Assistant Secretary Robert L. Herbst.

"The National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest, most comprehensive group of lands set aside for wildlife in the world," Andrus said. "It is worthy of our best and most professional stewardship. I am convinced that the steps we have asked to be taken and the policies we have outlined are in keeping with that kind of responsibility."

The recommendations cover a broad range of topics, including organization of the Refuge System, planning for acquisition of new refuge lands, and policies on management practices such as farming and animal control as well as activities such as sport hunting, fishing, and trapping.

They set the guidelines and policies by which national wildlife refuges will be managed in the future. They respond to a report published last year by the National Wildlife Refuge Study Task Force, a group of citizens and officials from private organizations, State wildlife agencies, and the Interior Department. The task force studied the operation of the 34-million acre Refuge System, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In preparing the recommendations, Herbst agreed with the task force's view that the refuge System needs to be expanded for both migratory birds and other wildlife including threatened and endangered species. He directed the

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Fish and Wildlife Service to prepare a 10-year plan for accomplishing these recommendations. He also directed that procedures should be established for identifying refuge lands that are no longer serving their intended purpose.

He added that alternatives to land ownership by the Fish and Wildlife Service, including easements, leases, and retention in private or State ownership, should be carefully studied, and suggested that the Service should also improve the management of existing refuges as an alternative to additional land acquisition.

Herbst asked the Service to complete State plans for its Unique Wildlife Ecosystem program, under which unusual areas of natural habitat are acquired and preserved as refuges. He also supported increased public involvement in refuge planning, improved public education programs on refuges, and designation of suitable refuge areas as wilderness.

Herbst supported the continuation of public hunting, fishing, and trapping on refuges, "so long as they are consistent with the Refuge System's objectives to preserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife resources and their habitat." Herbst said that Service policy "reflects and will continue to reflect the idea that refuges will not be managed primarily to produce game species but that sound, scientific wildlife management will produce populations normally able to sustain reasonable consumptive uses. . . Service and Departmental acceptance of the idea that public hunting, fishing, and trapping are legitimate recreational activities recognizes the considerable--and continuing--contribution of the American hunter and fisherman to the cause of wildlife protection and enhancement."

Herbst also found that grazing, timber harvesting, and agricultural practices could be permitted on refuges only when they are employed for the benefit of and are not harmful to wildlife and wildlife habitat. He pointed out that these practices may, in some cases, have secondary economic purposes. "Without exception," he said, "any economic uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System must be demonstrably compatible with Service objectives to preserve, protect, and enhance wildlife habitat."

Herbst's final recommendations are based not only on the task force report but on public comments about the report and on recommendations made by Fish and Wildlife Service Director Lynn A. Greenwalt following his own review of the task force report and public comments.

Herbst's report, "Final Recommendations on the Management of the National Wildlife Refuge System," is available free from the Publications Unit, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240 (202/343-2982).

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